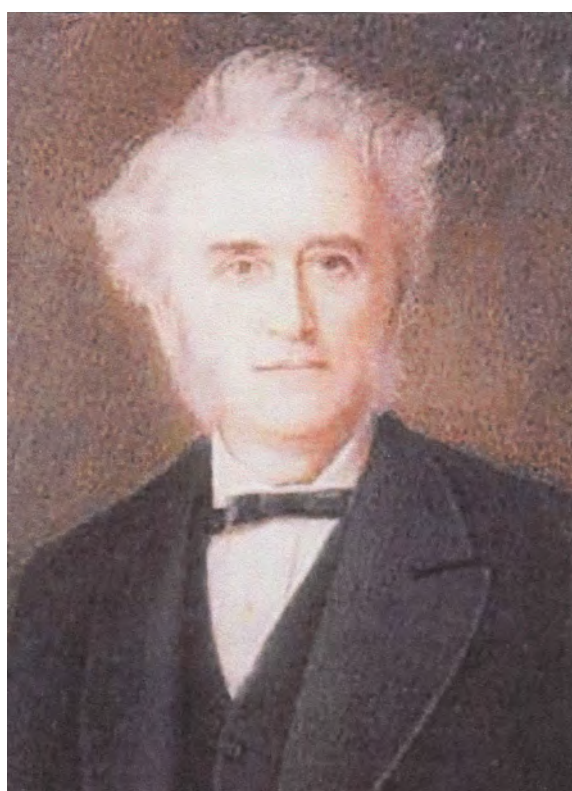


THE LANGDON DOWNS AND NORMANSFIELD

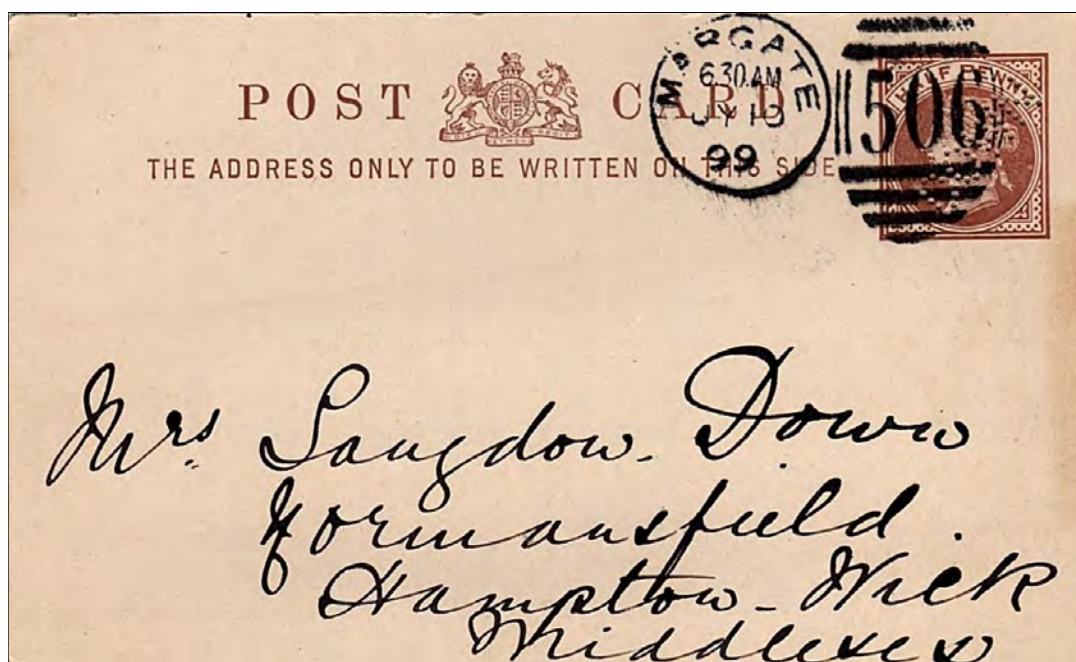
Richard Husband

Dr John Langdon Down (1828-1896) was born the youngest of six children in Torpoint, Devon. His father was in business as a druggist, grocer and linen draper and the family lived over the shop. In 1847 John passed the Pharmaceutical Society's examinations and in 1853 entered the London Hospital Medical School. He qualified as a doctor and became Medical Superintendant at the Royal Earlswood Asylum for Idiots in 1856, a post he held until 1868. In 1859 he was elected Assistant Physician at the Royal London Hospital and then upon his resignation in 1868 commenced in practice at 38 Welbeck Street, London W. In 1881, he moved to larger premises nearby at 81 Harley Street.



Dr John Langdon Down

He bought the White House, soon to be renamed Normansfield on the borders of Hampton Wick and Teddington in 1868 which, following his experiences at Earlswood, became a Private Home for the "care, education and treatment of those of good social position who present any degree of mental deficiency". The White House came with five acres of grounds and soon after purchase, adjoining properties were added so that the establishment eventually extended to 43 acres. In 1879 the Normansfield theatre was opened which served both as an entertainment centre and a church. From an initial 19 patients in 1868, Normansfield had 145 patients by the time Dr John Langdon Down died suddenly in 1896. Throughout this period, he remained Medical Superintendent and his wife Mary, whom he had married in 1860, acted as Administrator. Mary continued in this position until her own death in 1901.

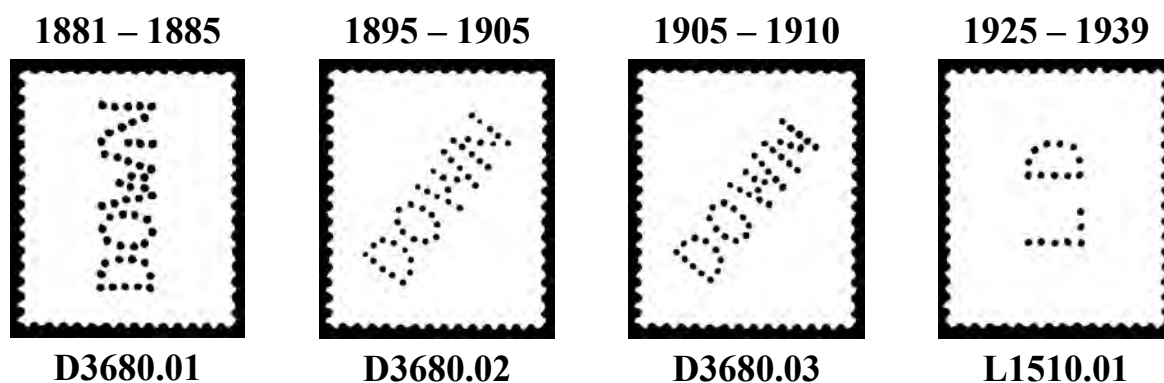


The first post card illustrated was indeed addressed to Mary from Margate postmarked 10th July 1899 with the word "DOWN" (D3680.02) perforated through the printed stamp. My guess from reading the card is that the sender might have been paid to give a group of patients a seaside holiday. This perfin die, also used to perforate adhesive stamps, is reported to have been used between 1895 and 1905. Perforated Queen Victoria 1/2d brown post cards have only been reported used between 3rd and 21st July 1899.



The second post card illustrated was postmarked at nearby Kingston upon Thames on 17 May 1907 and the printed stamp has again been perforated "DOWN" but this time using perfin die D3680.03 which is also reported to have been used to perforate adhesive stamps between 1905 and 1910. This postal stationery post card is the only one reported to have been perforated "DOWN" with this particular die. It was signed by Dr Reginald Langdon Down (1864-1955) who, with his wife Jane, succeeded his mother as Administrator after the latter's death in 1901. Reginald, together with his brother Percival (1868-1925), had become Medical Superintendents at Normansfield after their father's death in 1896. Both brothers, who had qualified as doctors in the first half of the 1890's, also set up in practice at 41 Welbeck Street, London W1 in 1915. Percival died in 1925 and Reginald continued the practice until 1931.

The four reported perfin dies are shown below:-



Following Percival Langdon-Down's death, the activities of Normansfield Hospital were transferred to a limited liability company with Reginald and Percival's widow Helen becoming directors. Perfin die 'LD' was in use between then and the outbreak of World War II. From now on, Normansfield's fortunes began to fade. The outbreak of hostilities caused a drop in investment incomes needed to pay for patients' fees and several bombs fell in the grounds. Stella Brain returned to Normansfield with her family to help her father, in managing Normansfield.

On 22nd June 1951, the family sold Normansfield to the government as it was no longer possible to run it at a profit. The hospital was transferred to the North West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board and immediately came under the control of Staines Group Hospital Management Committee. Normansfield subsequently became a certified institution under the 1959 Mental Health Act

Also in 1951, Percival's son, Norman was made Medical Superintendent, a post he held until his retirement in 1970. This was the same year Reginald's son John, born in 1905, died having been a patient suffering from Downs Syndrome. Lady Brain was appointed to the management committee in 1952. In 1957, Lady Brain formed an active League of Friends of Normansfield Hospital which raised money to provide additional facilities which included a school, a shop and club room for patients, a hydrotherapy pool and a holiday home, Bill House at Selsey, Sussex.

Dr Terence Lawlor succeeded Dr Norman Langdon-Down in 1970 and was suspended by the Kingston and Richmond Regional Health Authority in 1976 following a nurses' strike on 5 May 1976. By 1993, Normansfield Hospital had become part of the Richmond Twickenham and Roehampton Healthcare NHS Trust and in 1997 it closed. The main Grade II listed building was eventually renovated and converted into 61 apartments (see picture below) and further new homes are being planned for the site.



In the nineteenth century, Dr John Langdon Down specialized in treating patients who would these days be described as having Down's Syndrome, but then was referred to as mongolism. The World Health Organisation adopted the term "Down's Syndrome" in 1966.

Principal References:

1. John Langdon Down, 1828-1896, a caring pioneer, by O'Connor Ward, published by Royal Society of Medicine Press 1998
2. <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>
3. <http://miriam-may.com>
4. www.hainesphillips.co.uk